

# PLAY

Why PlayOLG

Responsible Gambling

Fun Stuff!

WordPlay



## Senet: The World's First Board Game

We all love playing games. It's a mix of the mental challenge, the uncertainty and the excitement, right? Well guess what: if you jumped into your time machine and whirled back to ancient Egypt, you'd still find yourself surrounded by enthusiastic game players. After all, they needed a fun break after heaving around those massive pyramid blocks.

Let's go back in time and look at one ancient Egyptian game in particular. It was a real trailblazer, the forerunner of modern backgammon and Parcheesi, and a game from which many of our other contemporary games evolved. We're talking about Ancient Egypt's Senet, or 'The Game of Passing,' which is believed to be the world's oldest game.

Pieces and boards of this ancient activity have been found in tombs dating back to 3000 BCE, but it's believed by some to be even older. Beautiful paintings of Senet have been discovered on tomb walls from the Old Kingdom through to Greco-Roman times. Simple game boards have even been found carved into the rock faces of quarry sites and near the work camps of pyramid builders, where workers could play it during breaks.

But the actual, physical game has also survived, thanks to many fortunate archaeological finds. More than 50 Senet game boards and countless pieces have been discovered. We even have one made out of earthenware tiles, right here in this province at our Royal Ontario Museum.

### Play like an Egyptian

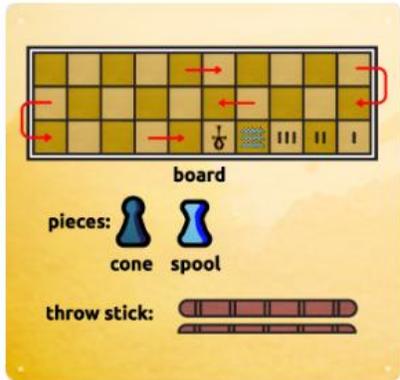
So let's take a look at the board, the tokens and how the game may have been played. Unfortunately, no ancient game rules have been found, but archaeologists have managed to form a pretty good idea of how it worked:

The Senet game board was comprised of thirty squares, arranged in three rows of ten. Some believe that the board was originally designed as a calendar, tracking the 30 days of the Egyptian month. It was played with two sets of either five or seven tokens, usually cone and spool-shaped pawns that progress in a reverse 'S' along the board. The ancient version of dice, known as 'throw sticks,' were cast to determine the number of spaces your pawn could move, passing or being passed by your opponent's tokens along the way.

Reaching the final square and leaving the board were the ultimate goals, just as reaching 'Horus' and leaving the netherworld were the goals for ancient Egyptians after death

Cont. 1/2

## How the game was played



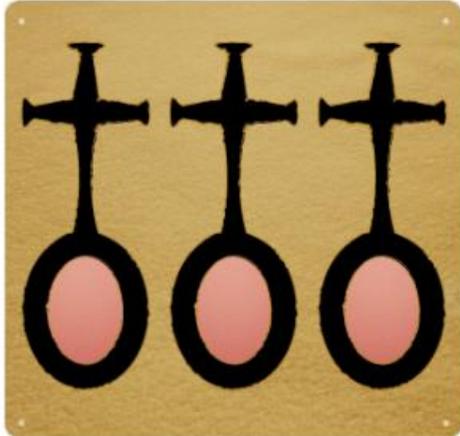
The game board included a number of unique squares with symbols that had lucky or unlucky meanings, much as we see in modern games:

## Square #15: House of rebirth



You would return here after falling into the waters of the Nile by landing on Square #27.

## Square #26: House of happiness



This embalming parlour square was lucky. This would allow you a free turn and let you proceed to the last 4 squares.

Rectangular Snip

## Square #27: House of waters

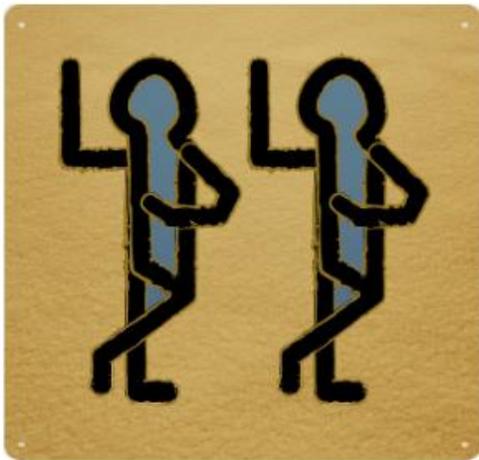


This 'water trap,' signifying a fall into the Nile, was unlucky. You could choose to fall back to square 15, or hope to roll a four to proceed.



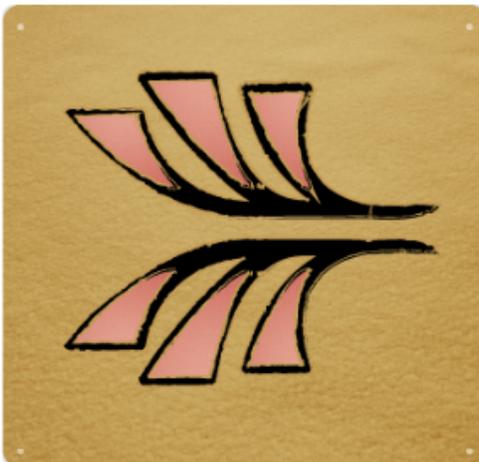
### Square #28: House of three judges

An exact throw of three was required to then exit the board.



### Square #29: House of two judges

An exact throw of two was required to then exit the board.



### Square #30: House of Horus

You joined the god Horus and left the board, winning the game along with a happy afterlife.

The most elaborate and beautiful of the ancient Senet games ever discovered is the gold, ivory and ebony game table that was found in the tomb of King Tutankhamen of the 18th Dynasty. It was set upon an impressive sledge and was one of four Senet games found in the boy king's tomb, so it seems he was a big-time fan. The original game pieces were missing, however, suggesting that they were likely made of gold and silver and stolen by robbers in antiquity.

## A soul-stirring pastime

Throughout its long 4000 year history, Senet remained a secular recreation enjoyed by royals and peasants, but by the New Kingdom, it was also used as a sort of ritual. In this period you also find tomb paintings of people playing against an invisible adversary, believed by some to symbolize the player's own soul. It's thought that in playing Senet, the Egyptians may have believed they could actively influence the afterlife and the judgment of their souls.

So there you go. Now you have the history and the how-to on what is thought to be the world's oldest board game! Considering these pharaohs and their people were gaming pioneers, it seems fitting that a number of our upcoming PlayOLG.ca casino games have Egyptian themes. PlayOLG.ca may be new and shiny, but in many ways we've got 4000 years of gaming evolution to thank. Cheers, Senet!

[Back to Fun Stuff!](#)